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Indigenous Archival Futures and the International Council on Archives Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: Indigenous Perspectives from Australia

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Abstract

2024 marked the 5th anniversary of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration, a critical milestone in the international archival community's commitment to transform archives by centring Indigenous leadership, self-determination and knowledge systems. This paper introduces and discusses the collaborative Australia-based research project Tracking Tandanya, launched in 2024 through a partnership between the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney, the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University, and the Australian Society of Archivists. The Tracking Tandanya project evaluates how the Declaration is advancing its aim of transforming archives to support Indigenous priorities, drawing on research data collected through a sector-wide survey of individuals and organisations engaging with, or implementing, the Declaration across Australia. Tracking Tandanya seeks to answer questions including: How is the Declaration being utilised in institutional contexts? Are projects being adequately resourced and evaluated? Are the reforms making an impact on community? Have archival practices begun to be reimagined? What are the trends from the Declaration's themes that are being addressed? By establishing this evidence base, the project aims to identify both strengths and areas for improvement in supporting Indigenous self-determination in archives.

Keywords: *First Nations archives; Impact evaluation; Rights in Records; Indigenous Archival Sovereignty*

The year 2024 marked the fifth anniversary of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration (the Declaration), a critical milestone in the international archival community's commitment to transform archives by centring Indigenous leadership, self-determination and knowledge systems.¹ At its core, the Declaration calls for both a fundamental resetting of relationships with Indigenous peoples and a radical reimagining of archives to honour Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. This requires a purposeful agenda to transform archival practices and realign them with the existing Indigenous rights framework outlined

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in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).² The Declaration identifies five priority areas for action: knowledge authorities, property and ownership, recognition and identity, research and access, and self-determination. However, without a clear implementation strategy, it remains difficult to assess how the Declaration is being activated, and crucially, how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia are shaping and benefiting from these changes.³

This article introduces and discusses *Tracking Tandanya: A Research Project to Track Implementation and Activation of the International Council on Archives (ICA) Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration in Australia*, a collaborative, pilot research project launched in 2025. The project is a partnership between the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the Faculty of Information Technology at Monash University, and the Australian Society of Archivists (ASA).

Through the collection of self-reported data via a survey and the development of a reporting mechanism, the project aims to gain insights into the implementation and impact of the Declaration in Australia. The project gathers information from individuals and organisations based in Australia, as well as overseas institutions involved in returning materials to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Through an anonymised survey, the project team aims to gather and surface data that reports on how the Declaration has been activated and embraced across the archives sector, and identify pathways for strengthening and expanding these efforts. As the Tracking Tandanya project is still in its initial phase of data collection and analysis, this article focuses on providing background and context rather than presenting findings. The aim is to outline the project's purpose, design, and guiding principles, setting the foundation for future reporting and sector engagement.

This article first outlines the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration in relation to gaps in understanding and in processes for data collection, implementation, and evaluation of statements on Indigenous self-determination in Australian archives, with particular attention on the Bringing Them Home Report's recommendations for record access. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the Tracking Tandanya project, including its aims, methodologies, and research design, along with initial reflections arising from the project's development.

Five years after the official launch of the Declaration, the Tracking Tandanya project offers an opportunity to gather and share data on its use and impact. The Tracking Tandanya project calls for increased transparency and accountability in the application of the Declaration, urging archives and other cultural repositories to prioritise Indigenous rights in recordkeeping practices that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

The ICA Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration

As the international peak body for professional archivists, the ICA is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting the effective management of records and the preservation, care, and use of the world's archival heritage through its representation of records and archive professionals across the globe.⁴ For over 60 years, the ICA has united archival institutions and practitioners worldwide to advocate for effective archival management and the protection of recorded heritage, to produce standards and best practices, and to encourage dialogue, exchange, and the transmission of knowledge and expertise across international borders.⁵ However, it was not until 2018 that the ICA formally addressed Indigenous rights and perspectives in archival practice.

The ICA Expert Group on Indigenous Matters (EGIM) was established by the ICA Programme Commission at the meeting in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in November 2018. According to the ICA website, the EGIM 'provides a forum for high-level discussions of issues related to

the recognition of Indigenous worldviews as vital components of archival theory and method, and the development of protocols for Indigenous knowledge management'.⁶ The establishment of EGIM marked an important moment for the ICA, as it focused on Indigenous priorities within international archival practices.

The following year, this focus on Indigenous priorities was formalised through the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration. The Declaration was launched in October 2019 in Adelaide, Australia, on the unceded land of the Kaurna peoples. The launch marked a significant milestone, with First Nations leaders from several Indigenous Nations around the world attending the meeting. It was seen as a potential turning point for archival practice, with widespread support from attendees. The Declaration calls upon archival institutions globally to adopt its themes and commitments, acknowledging that decolonising archival practice requires generational effort to transform archives into ethical spaces characterised by respect, negotiation and collaboration.⁷ The Declaration's five key themes are summarised next:

1. **Knowledge Authorities:** Colonial archival institutions must acknowledge that Indigenous cognitive frameworks for understanding history, memory and cultural identity exist alongside institutional knowledge systems. Decolonisation begins through the respectful integration of these knowledge authorities, informed by Indigenous ceremony, cultural tradition and social protocols.
2. **Property and Ownership:** Archival institutions must recognise Indigenous ownership of traditional knowledge, cultural expression and intellectual property. The Declaration emphasises that Western intellectual property frameworks based on individual ownership are inadequate for protecting Indigenous collective rights to cultural heritage.
3. **Recognition and Identity:** Indigenous peoples possess the right to recognition within archival systems as distinct peoples with unique kinship structures, identities and cultures. This requires Indigenous languages and social authority to inform collaborative, participatory approaches to archival representational systems (e.g., in the arrangement and description of archives), acknowledging the need for archives to represent dynamic and constantly changing relationships across creators, context and carriers of information.
4. **Research and Access:** The Declaration recognises that research and access constitute socially mediated processes requiring Indigenous communities to exercise control over state-generated information about them. Access to records containing traditional cultural expression must respect the social, legal and cultural protocols of affiliated Indigenous communities.
5. **Self-Determination:** Indigenous peoples hold the right to preserve and share their heritage as a fundamental human right. The Declaration recognises those UNDRIP articles having a direct relationship with self-determination.⁸

The Declaration's emphasis on self-determination and access rights echoes earlier reports and enquiries focused on access to records for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Of particular importance is the landmark Bringing Them Home Report (1997), which contained 54 recommendations to redress the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and concluded that the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was a gross violation of human rights.⁹ The Report's key archival recommendations included urgent funding for preserving and indexing Indigenous records, embargoing the destruction of relevant materials, and the establishment of Records Taskforces in each jurisdiction to develop culturally appropriate access guidelines.¹⁰

However, two decades later, The Healing Foundation (THF), which advocates for Stolen Generations Survivors' priorities, observed that most recommendations had not been implemented, creating additional trauma for Stolen Generations Survivors, with access to records remaining inconsistent and inequitable, particularly across state and territory borders, despite being crucial for healing.¹¹ THF has called for reviews of records access across all government levels and recommended establishing traineeships for Indigenous archivists and genealogists, emphasising that 'survivors are dying' and 'we cannot wait another generation' with only 6% of original recommendations clearly implemented after almost 28 years.¹²

The Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration's focus on Indigenous self-determination in archives provides an additional advocacy opportunity for the comprehensive implementation of the Bringing Them Home report's archival recommendations, half of which are yet to be implemented.¹³ In 2021, Barrowcliffe and colleagues urged the Australian archives sector to align their implementation of the Declaration with existing frameworks and models of structural reform relating to Indigenous rights in archives.¹⁴ This included 'holistic models of Indigenous Living Archives on country supported and resourced from national and state budgets and involving redistribution of funding for the public archival sector' and 'Rights-based approaches, for example, the Charter of Lifelong Rights in Childhood Recordkeeping developed for the Out-of-Home Care sector in Australia, including rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Care today and the Stolen Generations'.¹⁵

Gaps in data collection, implementation and evaluation

In 2020, the year following the publication of the Declaration several key concerns were raised concerning its effectiveness and impact. Barrowcliffe and colleagues highlighted 'the lack of proactive initiative around the implementation of the Tandanya Declaration after it was published'.¹⁶ They urged the Australian archives sector to engage with the Declaration to drive transformative practice and to confront 'how the settler-colonial status quo is too often buried under the rhetoric of decolonisation and reconciliation'.¹⁷

As outlined by THF in their 2025 evaluation of the status of the 54 recommendations from the Bringing Them Home report, there has been a multi-decade failure in the Australian archives sector to implement transformative archival practice that benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as was recommended in 1997 by the Bringing Them Home report.¹⁸ These institutional gaps in the realisation of Indigenous self-determination in archives are not unique to Bringing Them Home; they extend to the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration as well. Without systematic tracking, it remains unclear whether institutions are following through on the Declaration's five key themes or whether the Declaration is producing real and relevant impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Learning from the lessons of the Bringing Them Home implementation, establishing processes to monitor the Declaration is important to avoid these patterns of institutional inaction.

Internationally, following the launch of the Declaration in 2019, several organisations expressed their interest and support. In an article for the ICA Flash Magazine, Raymond Frogner, Senior Director of Research and Head of Archives at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (Canada), observed that:

'Immediately following the signing, the Association des Archivistes du Québec released a public statement in support of the Declaration. The Association of Canadian Archivists made a similar public statement. [...] The Norwegian government also translated the Declaration into two dialects of Sami. [...] Beyond formal institutions' endorsement and conference debates, the Declaration has made a more subtle impact on the policies and procedures of public archives. In Canada, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

(NCTR – National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation) wrote its statement on Indigenous Data Sovereignty in full recognition of the Tandanya’s language’.¹⁹

Since then, in Australia, the Tandanya Declaration has been publicly supported or officially endorsed by several organisations, including Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), the Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities (CAARA), the National Archives of Australia (NAA), and State Records of South Australia. Professional associations, including the ASA, and the National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA), have also formally endorsed the Declaration.

The Declaration has the potential to be utilised worldwide as a framework for transforming research and practice. Dr Jamila Ghaddar’s work in the Archives & Digital Media Lab, a sibling organisation of the Archival Technologies Lab at the City University of New York, demonstrates this in action. The training programme, Fundamentals of Archival Management & Emergency Mitigation in Palestine, Lebanon & the Global South, grounds its curriculum explicitly in the Tandanya Declaration, using it as a tool to challenge Eurocentrism in archival practice and centre community-led practices. The programme focuses on ‘emergency preparedness, disaster mitigation, and archival first aid’ to support cultural heritage preservation in conflict settings, demonstrating how the principles of the Declaration can inform pedagogy in contexts where decolonial actions are most urgently needed.²⁰

Additionally, several public forums and talks have been organised to explore and discuss the Declaration in an Australia, Aotearoa and Pacific Islands context. For example, the *Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Symposium*, jointly led and organised in 2024 by the ASA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Special Interest Group and the Indigenous Archives Collective (IAC), was hosted by the Archives & Records Association of New Zealand Te Huinga Mahara. Chaired by Tracking Tandanya project team member Dr Lauren Booker, the event brought together voices from across the sector to share how institutions are responding to the Declaration and to foster dialogue on its implementation.

In 2024, CAARA marked the 5-year anniversary of the Declaration by collating and publishing a summary of CAARA jurisdictions’ work across each of the Declaration’s themes. The summary report details the actions taken by Australian national, state, and territory archive institutions in response to the Declaration.²¹ The report highlighted institutional responses to the Declaration and represents a significant step towards accountability by establishing a mechanism for tracking actions and commitments. However, the report also highlights persistent gaps and inconsistencies in tracking mechanisms across the sector. There is no clear baseline for measuring progress, making it difficult to assess impact and identify areas requiring urgent attention. For instance, what does the archival sector mean by ‘Indigenous self-determination’ in practical terms? Is it about governance, control over records, or shared decision-making authority? Similarly, how are changes in staff behaviours measured? These gaps underscore the need for clearer indicators and metrics, stronger accountability frameworks, and more tangible examples of how the Declaration’s principles are being embedded in everyday archival work.

These examples show that, despite endorsements from several organisations, the Declaration’s efficacy remains unclear due to the absence of consistent, comprehensive, sector-wide evaluation. Barrowcliffe and colleagues highlighted the urgent need for baseline data to understand how the Declaration is being implemented at national and international levels.²² Currently, there is no publicly accessible registry of institutional commitments, nor is there a public tracking mechanism through the ICA. This lack of systematic monitoring makes it difficult to assess uptake, identify best practices, or hold institutions accountable to the Declaration’s principles and immediate actions. This gap reflects a broader challenge across the Galleries, Libraries, Archives, and Museums (GLAM) sector: measuring success

in Indigenous-led initiatives requires metrics that serve both institutional accountability and Indigenous community priorities and self-determination.

The literature highlights a disconnect between conventional metrics and the community-driven outcomes that Indigenous-led archival initiatives seek to achieve.²³ Traditional, often quantitative methods adapted from social sciences or library frameworks fail to capture the multidimensional nature of archival impact, particularly in relation to social justice.²⁴ Given these challenges, archival research in recent decades has increasingly focused on measuring the impact of social justice initiatives, recognising archives as active agents that shape power dynamics through decisions around preservation, description, and access. Duff and colleagues propose a multidimensional framework for assessing social justice impact, acknowledging that archival effects range from tangible (e.g., court decisions) to intangible (e.g., emotional healing) and are complex, long-term, and often unquantifiable.²⁵

The context of the archive also matters. Cifor and Lee critique neoliberal pressures that prioritise demonstrable outcomes and economic metrics, warning that social justice language can be co-opted to serve market-oriented agendas.²⁶ Such approaches risk universalising measures and reinforcing the hierarchies inherent in archival work. Yet, despite these challenges, developing nuanced evaluation methods remains critical for demonstrating value, securing funding, and fostering innovation though these methods must resist the very neoliberal frameworks they seek to challenge.²⁷

The Tracking Tandanya project literature review examined other projects that have undertaken similar measurement processes within the archival sector. A key insight from this review was the importance of self-assessment, which the team aims to integrate into future iterations of the Tracking Tandanya project. The Digital Preservation Coalition's Rapid Assessment Model (DPC RAM) – identified through this review – provides a structured framework for evaluating organisational capacity across areas such as governance, policy, resources, and technical infrastructure.²⁸ This approach emphasises identifying strengths and gaps, enabling institutions to prioritise actions and build sustainable digital preservation strategies.

The Tracking Tandanya project

The Tracking Tandanya project was established to address these gaps by gathering baseline data on the implementation of the Declaration in Australia. Developed as a collaboration between Jumbunna Research (UTS), Monash University, and the ASA, it aims to identify both the Declaration's activation in practice and areas needing further support, resources, and advocacy.

The project uses an online, anonymised, voluntary survey to gather information from the Australian archive sector and collecting institutions on their engagement with the Declaration. The survey comprises 53 questions aligned with the Declaration's five key themes and priorities. The project seeks to answer the following questions to identify both strengths and areas for improvement in supporting Indigenous self-determination in archives:

- How is the Declaration being utilised in institutional contexts?
- Are projects being adequately resourced and evaluated?
- Are the reforms making an impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
- Has the Declaration created opportunities for archival practices to be reimagined?
- What trends from the Declaration's themes are being addressed?

The project team was directed in the research design by their combined experience and expertise in the Australian archives sector and the GLAM sector more broadly, and co-developed

the research questions through a critical lens to explore the potential of the Declaration's implementation as a transformative practice. Furthermore, all project team members were present at the inaugural ICA Indigenous Matters Summit in 2019, where the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration was presented as a call to 'jurisdictional archives of the world to acknowledge and adopt the themes and commitments of the Declaration for immediate action'.²⁹

The project team invited Jeff Timberly (Bidjigal) to create an artwork as the project logo. Timberly's piece, *Nudjim* (meaning 'fresh water' in the Dharawal language), serves as a vibrant visual representation of the project, reflecting on the importance of archival access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Timberly explains the meaning of the artwork and how it represents the project:

A waterhole where I had it for archives is because people go to the archives, in the archives they can put information in, and they take information out. When people go to a waterhole, as well as they can put things in and take things out, but also all the animals and everything else can utilise it. So, it's like everybody using the archives, every living thing can use the waterhole. The tracks that exist around are the same way as in records are being kept and recorded, the same way as all the tracks that are left on the trails that lead there and the mud that exists around the waterhole is the information that's left behind there, and people utilise that information.³⁰

Timberly's artwork conceptualises archives as a waterhole – an active, relational space where knowledge flows and accumulates. This metaphor highlights the project's perspective on archives as dynamic entities shaped by interaction, movement, and shared responsibility, rather than static repositories of information.

Methodology and research design

The Tracking Tandanya project is led by Indigenous Research Methodologies and is based on the right of Indigenous peoples to self-govern their cultural heritage, as established by the UNDRIP.³¹ It is firmly grounded in the principles of the Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement, especially those articulated by the Maïam Nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective, who lead this field in Australia. According to these principles, Indigenous peoples have the right to:

- Exercise control of the data ecosystem, including creation, development, stewardship, analysis, dissemination and infrastructure.
- Data that are contextual and disaggregated (available and accessible at individual, community and First Nations levels).
- Data that are relevant and empowers sustainable self-determination and effective self-governance.
- Data structures that are accountable to Indigenous peoples and First Nations.
- Data that are protective and respects our individual and collective interests.³²

Embedding these principles into the Tracking Tandanya project required moving beyond a narrow focus on archival records access to encompass the broader dimensions of Indigenous Data Sovereignty. This includes ensuring transparency in how data are collected, managed, and shared, as well as establishing accountability mechanisms that prioritise Indigenous governance and decision-making. In this way, the project acknowledges that archives are not neutral repositories but are part of a broader data ecosystem in which power, control, and responsibility must be redistributed to uphold Indigenous rights and self-determination.

In the light of these power dynamics, the use of Indigenous Research Methodologies offered opportunities for greater transparency and accountability in implementing the Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles embedded within the Declaration. This methodological approach aligns with broader decolonisation efforts to transform collecting institutions, as scholars such as Smith, O’Neal, Caswell, and Thorpe have articulated in their work on Indigenous information practices and institutional change.³³ The ultimate goal of this project is to create data that will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their community archives, both in the present and for future generations.

The project methodology also draws on guidelines for ethical research in Australia, such as the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research and its four core principles of Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous leadership, impact and value, and sustainability and accountability.³⁴

The Tracking Tandanya project uses Qualtrics, an online platform for building, distributing, and analysing surveys. The survey was circulated among Aboriginal community archives and local and national collecting institutions across the country, and participants had 1 month to respond (the survey closed on 8 October 2025). It collected both quantitative and qualitative data through open-ended questions, enabling survey participants to share their experiences, challenges, and innovations.

The pilot survey consisted of 53 questions, taking approximately 30 minutes to complete, and was organised into seven sections:

1. Institutional Background

This section gathered baseline data on the organisation, including its type (e.g., State/Territory archives, Aboriginal Keeping Place), staff numbers, location, and the respondent’s role. It established whether the institution holds collections relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (and the context of those materials) and whether it has received funding to support implementation.

2. Awareness and Endorsement of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration

This section assessed the organisation’s familiarity with the Tandanya Declaration, including how it first became aware of it and its level of understanding. Core questions explored whether the organisation has formally endorsed the Declaration, the drivers for endorsement (e.g., organisational priorities, community requests), and the main barriers (e.g., limited resources, legal constraints). It also examined whether the Declaration informs policy development and whether Indigenous governance structures are in place.

3. Implementation of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration Priority Themes

This section examined organisational practices across the Declaration’s five priority themes:

- Knowledge Authorities – Evaluated recognition of Indigenous knowledge frameworks, community consultation, provision of Right of Reply, and the existence of shared-stewardship agreements.
- Property and Ownership – Assessed acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership of traditional knowledge, return of materials to communities, and support for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights.
- Recognition and Identity – Measured engagement with Indigenous peoples in record description, actions to address colonial bias (e.g., revising problematic language, adding warning statements) and acknowledgement of Country and Place.

- **Research and Access** – Reviewed protocols for research involving Indigenous materials, approaches to Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and handling of culturally sensitive materials (e.g., community decision-making, restricted access).
- **Self-Determination** – Examined the extent to which archival practices support Indigenous self-determination and actively counter colonial narratives within collections.

4. Organisational Capacity and Resourcing

This section evaluated the organisation's internal ability to implement the principles of the Declaration. It included a rating of current capacity, ranging from no capacity to high-level capability, and asked respondents to rank the resources that would be most beneficial, such as additional funding, increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing, policy templates and toolkits, or leadership support. The section also explored how engagement with the Declaration had been communicated to staff (e.g., through mechanisms such as all-staff meetings, email, or training sessions) and whether specific guidance was provided on its application in daily work, including the nature of that guidance.

5. Partnerships and Community Engagement

This section explored collaborative relationships and decision-making structures within the organisation. It asked whether formal partnerships existed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to support the activation of the Declaration, including the number and type of partnerships, such as shared custody agreements, research collaborations, or community advisory roles. It also assessed the effectiveness of these partnerships and any barriers. Furthermore, the section examined whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff hold decision-making positions at senior leadership, management, or professional levels, and whether the organisation has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board, either formal or informal.

6. Training and Professional Development

This section assessed staff competency and readiness to implement the principles outlined in the Declaration. It examined the types of cultural competency training provided, including Indigenous cultural awareness, anti-racism, ICIP, and Indigenous rights training. It also asked respondents to rate how prepared the organisation was to implement these principles (from 'not prepared at all' to 'fully prepared'). Finally, the section sought input on the professional development opportunities considered most valuable, including workshops on Indigenous methodologies, legal and ethical frameworks, and leadership and change management.

7. Challenges and Future Directions

The final section focused on outcomes, challenges, and future planning. It examined how the organisation measures the impact of programmes and initiatives related to Indigenous communities and collections, using methods such as community feedback, usage statistics, or policy implementation tracking. It also considered how the organisation communicates its commitment to the Declaration's principles through channels such as website updates, social media, and community meetings. Respondents were asked to identify the three main challenges to implementation, outline their vision for the next 5 years, and suggest what support from the broader archival profession would be most helpful, such as professional standards, funding advocacy, or policy toolkits. Finally, the section invited feedback on how the Declaration could be enhanced for the Australian context and provided space for additional comments.

Methodological reflections and key challenges

The Tracking Tandanya project's research questions, outlined at the beginning of this article, aim to move beyond descriptive reporting and encourage critical reflection on the transformative potential of the Tandanya Declaration. The primary challenge in fulfilling this aim was developing an appropriate methodological approach, particularly given the absence of impact indicators specifically designed for the archival sector (ones that could be applied consistently across both mainstream and community archival contexts). This gap required the project team to build a research design that not only collects data but also encourages respondents to engage in self-assessment and reflection. The intention was to ensure that participation was not limited to answering questions but became an opportunity to consider the multiple dimensions and broader implications of the Tandanya Declaration in archival practice. This reflective process might create awareness and highlight the tension between what institutions should already be doing as baseline practice (such as digitisation or providing access to collections) and what constitutes transformative action.

The Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement has set a high standard for advancing Indigenous rights, shifting the focus from mere access to meaningful participation in decision-making. Guided by these principles, the research design focused on creating impact measures that align with and reinforce these elevated benchmarks for Indigenous rights. The consideration of these standards prompted the project team to critically reflect on the role of international bodies, such as the ICA, in advancing an Indigenous self-determination agenda. This project was developed not only to explore institutional practices but also to spark dialogue on the need for transformative action. Central to this dialogue is the tension between baseline responsibilities that international organisations should already fulfil and the deeper structural shifts required across the archives sector for genuine progress towards Indigenous self-determination.

Another methodological consideration was determining the appropriate respondent category. Individual perspectives and organisational responses offer distinct insights, yet prioritising one over the other risks overlooking critical nuances. To address this challenge, the project team designed the survey to capture both individual and organisational perspectives. However, to minimise duplication, each organisation was asked to nominate a single respondent to complete the survey anonymously on its behalf.

Resource allocation emerged as a critical consideration throughout the project, raising questions about scope and responsibility. Should the survey's primary audience be institutions with formal archival mandates, or should it extend to community archives and collecting organisations? And who bears responsibility for funding the practical implementation of the Tandanya Declaration within these diverse contexts, particularly community archives that often operate with minimal resources? Persistent gaps in resourcing and evaluation tools risk undermining the Declaration's objectives and raise fundamental questions about accountability.

These methodological challenges were discussed extensively by the research team and ultimately shaped the project's design. Addressing these issues was essential to ensure that the project did more than simply collect data or provide a superficial view of the Declaration's implementation. Instead, the goal was to generate insights that examine the depth and quality of institutional change and assess whether it leads to tangible, lasting benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Interim findings from the Tracking Tandanya project

Archives and archival practice in Australia are inextricably tied to the settler colonial state, both past and present. The Tracking Tandanya project recognises the key role archives play

in establishing and upholding the settler colonial state and highlights the need for increased transparency and accountability in the application of the Declaration in this context. If implemented effectively, the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration has the potential to be transformative for the archive sector internationally.

The collection of data from institutions and organisations engaging with the Declaration provides an opportunity to map the current scope of the Declaration's use and impact. As the Tracking Tandanya project is currently in its early stages of data collection and analysis, the key focus of this article is to provide background to the project rather than project findings. However, aligned with the 5 years of engagement with the Declaration by the project team, the following interim considerations are offered:

- What mechanisms are currently in place across the Australian archives sector to measure the impact of statements, such as the Declaration, in a consistent and transparent manner? How can we prioritise accountability for institutions and organisations that have endorsed the Declaration to deliver on their commitments?
- How do we consistently differentiate the transformative implementation of the Declaration from actions and initiatives that are already within the remit of status quo archival practice? What is performative and what is transformative?
- Can the Declaration have an impact without clear implementation strategies? Effective and sustained activation of the Declaration requires the development of institutional implementation strategies.

Conclusion

The Tracking Tandanya project is an important step towards establishing a baseline of understanding of how the principles of the ICA Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration are being applied across the archival sector, specifically in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. Launched 5 years after the Tandanya Declaration's official release, this project was established to address the lack of systematic data collection, implementation strategies, and evaluation mechanisms regarding Indigenous archival rights. By collecting self-reported data through a voluntary, anonymised online survey, the project aims to gain insights into the Declaration's implementation and effectiveness, examining the depth of institutional commitment it has generated.

This article explores the significance of this initiative, situating it within a broader historical context, particularly the persistent challenges of limited implementation and accountability following the landmark *Bringing Them Home Report*.³⁵ The Tracking Tandanya project urges greater transparency and responsibility in applying the Declaration. As a pilot project, it establishes foundational data to inform future development and implementation, calling on archives and cultural institutions to actively uphold Indigenous rights in recordkeeping practices, ensuring they support the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The analysis of the methodological approach provided a critical lens on the complexities within the archival sector in this area. A key challenge was the lack of a shared impact framework for measuring progress against the Declaration, which made it difficult to develop a cohesive, unified methodology for collecting data across institutions. Variations in terminology and existing frameworks further underscore the complexity of assessing sector-wide engagement.

Another significant challenge was the absence of clear baseline data outlining the fundamental requirements for institutions, despite the Declaration being endorsed by several organisations in Australia and overseas. This raises an important question: what is the difference

between endorsement and action? Without agreed-upon standards, it remains unclear what constitutes baseline practice versus transformative change.

In response to these gaps, the project team identified three critical questions: What mechanisms exist to measure impact consistently and transparently? How can transformative action be distinguished from performative gestures? And can the Declaration succeed without concrete implementation strategies and adequate resourcing?

Despite these challenges, the Declaration has the potential to drive transformative change across the archival sector. The Tracking Tandanya project seeks not only to establish a foundational dataset but also to generate insights into current practices, pinpoint areas for improvement, and identify opportunities for growth. Ultimately, the aim is to foster meaningful dialogue and accountability across Australia.

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Dr Monica Galassi is a Research Fellow at the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research at the University of Technology Sydney. Monica's scholarship and advocacy centre on social justice, with a strong focus on the importance of access to and control over cultural heritage. Her research sits at the intersection of archival practice and theory, aiming to support research approaches that can drive meaningful institutional change in response to community needs and aspirations. Through her PhD and ongoing work, Monica has developed methodologies for knowledge translation that prioritise community-centred approaches and strengthen the impact and accountability of research.

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in archives and data, and develops research and engagement in relation to refiguring libraries and archives to support the culturally appropriate ownership, management and ongoing preservation of Indigenous knowledges.

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